AVERSION THERAPY THEATER

WHEN PERFORMANCE ART BECOMES NECESSARY

EDITORIAL

IMPOSSIBLE?

DREAMS FROM A PLANET IN PERIL

YOUTUBE.COM/ LEESTEPHANIEROSCOE

Artwork from a Resistance Theater Online Performance of Lee Roscoe's "Dreams from a Planet in Peril."

I was talking to Artscope Magazine's editor, Brian Goslow, about my play "IMPOSSIBLE?" a story of what happens to friends in a small New England town when a tyrannical president takes over the nation, and he asked me to write a piece about it. I call it a guerilla theater recorded Zoom performance. Because of my lack of any production budget, this is an inexpensive way to get a play up and out there. I gathered actors, gave them visual backgrounds to use to set scenes, my editor put the scenes together and there's even a bit of music and sound effects.

The point that I wanted to make with the film was to wake people, our people, people on the left who are asleep, not aware of how we are in a rising autocracy. Because for every Adam Schiff or Jamie Raskin or Bernie Sanders or AOC (Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez), or even the hundreds of thousands who have rallied for Hands Off — there are still millions of sleep walkers, caught in the fog of disbelief, that a dictator can't happen here, not realizing that human beings are being disappeared, due process and law is scorned, safety nets are ripped apart, science degraded, workers treated like garbage, children and seniors viewed as disposable.

The folks on the Trump side aren't going to watch the play, but if they do, they will see one of the characters who's pretty much like them. He's a farmer, Eldredge Landon, part Yankee, part Cape Verdean, who is friends with our reluctant hero, alternative radio station manager, Dave O'Sulley.

Landon's a conservative. He thinks President Eddie Fabuloso has something, that we need a change, and he can help Americans to it. Landon joins Fabuloso's militia. But as Fabuloso usurps more and more power, and the militia becomes more savage, and when they force him to part with his beloved farm ("half my flesh is the land I've farmed"), he has an epiphany that "this isn't about conservative government; this is about total control," and his actions change.

I am grounded in the guerilla/underground/avant-garde ethos of 1960s theater and belief. I had leads in what I call cinema verité as fiction films for Norman Mailer when I was barely into my 20s, (see the book, "The Cinema of Norman Mailer: Film is Like Death"). I trained in New York as an actress with notables such as Michael Kahn and Walt Witcover, worked backstage and got my Equity card when I was 18, acting Off-Broadway.

Not so long ago, the Living Theatre, the radical Brechtian theater which started the Off-Broadway movement, and which inspired me to want to do theater, performed "POOR," which founder Judith Malina called brilliant — about a man who has been swamped by an oppressive economy, has lost everything, including his dignity — and takes a theater hostage.

I wrote and directed an underground film, "Dreams from a Planet in Peril," which is four interconnected stories of planetary abuse and the underlying causes. Using science and poetry, mythological beings confront man about the wrecking of the oceans and fresh waters.

There is a reminder of the beauty of our beloved world, planet and its people, and of kindness. And there's a dream in which I, as Gaia, confront the corporate overlords, and their puppet pols, and as they arrest me, one turns to camera and tears up the Constitution, later proclaiming, "Kill the surplus poor, let the poor die!"

Yes, "Dreams from a Planet in Peril" is agitprop, inspired in part by the savagery of George Grosz, whose cartoons warned of the rise of Nazism and tried to warn his fellow Germans by holding the proverbial mirror up to the society of the time. Sometimes we need agitprop.

I have predicted that America would become fascist since I was in my 20s. Born at the end of World War II as a secular Jewish female, the Holocaust and nuclear war haunted my soul; my father helped liberate the death camps. I watched carefully while forces of bigotry, religious chauvinism, militarism, stupidity and greed coalesced to cruelty, some of which I experienced firsthand — even as the far-right planned for decades to take control.

I understand that many American have high expectations, and when those are dashed, they fill the vacuum with rage and that turns to hatred, and that hatred seeks to blame, it seeks revenge. I have compassion for the pain, but not for the actions resulting from it, not for the need to feel superior to someone or something else.

One of my plays, "The End of America in the Time of the Fireflies," is a story of takeover by Christian Nationalists. Incited by a "national emergency," a marginalized woman is arrested in the house of her lover; the family falls, even as the nation does, and the hideousness which repression releases is revealed, even as our heroine believes that there is a green growth of renewal under the scar of cruelty.

"The Second Coming or the God Annals" ritualizes in a nine-scene cartoon, the apocalyptic ecocide and genocide which humans in their common psychoses are capable of. "The Men or Stalking Random Pastels" is a story of how subtle relentless harassment by white supremacist misogynists destroy a love affair; it is a memory, mystery play; a lyrical look at why we love and what love is or may be.

I call my work aversion therapy theater. We need art and for me, in particular, the sacred ritual of theater, it has the same force of nature, of moon, forest and ocean — to wake our hearts ups to what the matrix of a destructive society and such as carnivore capitalism, corrupt political systems, authoritarianism, do to human relationships, to our hearts and souls, and to the earth herself. In a way, to understand one, you must expose all and perform a catharsis to heal and renew.

If we change perception this way, we might change our conscience and begin to create a new culture which cares for the Earth and each other, which is not ruled by the most destructive force of all: contempt.

We surely do not need more theater of self-affirming, self-referencing, bourgeois triviality.

And, as people think it's fashionable to bash Boomers for not solving all the world's problems in one generation, I remember how they seeded the ground for ecological, economic, gender and racial justice, fighting for peace, to end wars, for a woman's right to choose, how it sought at the best of itself, an alternative way to live in harmony with all races and creatures, softly, with concern.

But we must be able to see a story like "Impossible?" or "The End of America in the Time of the Fireflies," or "The Men or Stalking Random Pastels" and say, oh my goodness, that could happen to me — and react and wake up in order to be able to act.

(To view "Dreams from a Planet in Peril" and "IMPOSSIBLE?" visit YouTube.com and search for Lee Roscoe and the forementioned movie titles.)

Lee Roscoe

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2025 EVENTS

STITCH: Runway Show + Style Market
Our fashion fundraiser, celebrating Maine designers
MAY 22 | PORTLAND, ME
MAINECRAFTS.ORG

CRAFT APPRENTICE PROGRAM:
Mentors + Apprentices Capstone Exhibition
A presentation of seven months of educational collaborations + mentorship
OCTOBER 3 | EDGECOMB, ME
MAINECAP.ORG

MAINE CRAFT WEEKEND
Annual statewide tour of Maine craft artist studios, businesses + events
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2025 EVENTS

FOUND OBJECT: Seconds + Supplies Market
Source artwork, craft objects, studio supplies
June 28 | PORTLAND, ME

GUILD FINE CRAFT SHOWS: MDI
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AUGUST 1 - 3 | BAR HARBOR, ME

PORTLAND FINE CRAFT SHOW
100+ juried exhibitors from the greater Northeast
AUGUST 23 | PORTLAND, ME

GUILD FINE CRAFT SHOW: Brunswick
Presenting Guild Level Members of the MCA
OCTOBER 25 + 26 | BRUNSWICK, ME

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